The Black Cat

LIBRARY OF CONGRESS COPYRIGHT JUN 3 1896 WASHINGTON

THE SHORTSTORY PUBLISHING CO. 144 HIGH ST., BOSTON, MASS.

№10 Copyright, 1896 by The Shortstory Publishing Co.

No Use Trying—It's Mended with

Spalding's Glue

"HOLDS LIKE A VISE"

For repairing Furniture, Toys, Paper, etc. Useful in every House and Store. A popular article for over 30 years. Warranted SEVEN TIMES the strength of any other liquid glue. Sold everywhere. Price, 20c.

HALL & RUCKEL, New York, Proprietors of Spalding's Glue, Sozodont, and other famous preparations.

"All that goes up must come down"

IF NOT HELD UP LIKE

Hartshorn Shade Rollers

on unbreakable brackets. This roller, with its fine bearings and scientifically constructed spring, carries the shade up or down with ease, free from any harsh or cranky action. Avoid the rollers that are "Just as Good," and get the genuine with Stewart Hartshorn's autograph on label.

PLEASES EVERYBODY.
A Wonderful Instrument.

PLAYING 1,000 TUNES.

Musical people wonder at its brilliancy of tone and artistic effects. It is unrivaled as a social entertainer. Never needs tuning, is always ready to play, and will last a lifetime.

Plays all your Favorite Music,

including selections from latest comic operas, songs, marches, and dance music. Nothing about it to get out of order and the tune discs, being of metal, are indestructible. These boxes run from 10 to 30 minutes with each winding and are far superior in tone and brilliancy to the old style Swiss music boxes. The cases are highly ornamental and will prove a handsome addition to any room. These boxes are cheap enough to place them within reach of all lovers of good music. Sold by all music dealers.

BOXES FROM $14. TO $100.

Send for handsome illustrated catalogue.

Regina Music Box Co., Rahway, N. J.

The Black Cat

A Monthly Magazine of Original Short Stories.

No. 10. JULY, 1896. 5 cents a copy. 50 cents a year.

Entered at the Post-Office at Boston, Mass., as second-class matter.

IMPORTANT.—The entire contents of this magazine are covered by copyright and publishers everywhere are cautioned against reproducing any of the stories, either wholly or in part.

On the Last Trail.

BY H. W. PHILLIPS AND RUPERT HUGHES.

IF it is true that cutting off the hands of a Baxter Street clothier deprives him of all power of speech, what argument can a cowboy be expected to enforce if you take away his arms? The "short, sharp bark" of his pistol, always at hand, quick, faithful, and vicious as a watch-dog, is the colleague of his disputation. It is the italics, the exclamation point, the conclusion of his syllogistic premises, and the umpire of his debate. This, at least, is the case with the very newest and roughest western settlements.

Rapid City (the "city" being the star at which the townspeople aimed, rather than an index of population) — Rapid City was an extreme example of these picturesque but unwholesome communities. The alarming death-rate, indeed, managed to secure the town a certain amount of free advertising, but even this was of a sort that tended to induce less immigration than emigration. The painful realization of this latter unpoetic truth compelled the local marshal to issue a reluctant edict forbidding man, woman, child, or broncho to "pack a gun" within the vague limits of the city. He was not blind to the heroic poetry of staking a life on a tiny bullet, or the dramatic justice of an appeal to arms; but he was there primarily to serve the municipal

Copyright, 1896, by the Shortstory Publishing Company. All rights reserved.

advantage. So he nailed up his manifesto,— with the revolutionary effect of Luther's theses.

To the cow-punchers, the act looked like trespass upon personal liberty. Most of them asked, with true Athenian spirit, what in hell was the use of a damned democracy if a man couldn't take care of himself and keep other damned fools off his range, by God. One or two of the more sedate and learned held that the Marshal's ultimatum was "uncons'tootional." Few of them had much idea as to the exact content of the sonorous term (has any one?), but it plainly put the Marshal in a bad light.

Yet none of the rank-blooming protests fruited into active resistance. A pistol, in the sensation-surfeited mind of the cow-puncher, is a mere personal ornament and a gaudy toy, or a lightning-thoughted despot, whose decisions are both terrible and irrevocable — entirely according to the man administering it.

Now the present incumbent of the marshalcy of Rapid City had won his exalted position solely because no one could recall a time when he had been either dilatory for a fatal moment, or inaccurate for an effective hair's-breadth, in his manipulation of that product of the American desire for quick results.

So the cow-punchers took out their revenge in oaths and threats against the next election; and, from the very day after the edict, the place of the pistol knew it no more. Men had a half-clad look and a naked, defenseless feeling without their customary armament. Many a hand ran back to an unresponsive belt, and quarrels went tame and all unsatisfactory. How was a man to prove his ownership of an over-boiling "jack-pot" with only empty hands to verify his claim? How set the tenderfoot to hopping in Terpsichorean terror? How avenge the lie direct without artillery? For fists are undignified weapons on the frontier, and for use only in unimportant squabbles, and as an introduction to the higher court procedure of the revolver.

Every Rapid citizen knew for awhile the uncanny feeling of helpless fear; was timid of "declaring himself" and promulgating his ability to lick all creation; was timid of dogma and candor till his hungry eye found his adversary likewise shorn of pistolic power. All the citizens walked the town cold-spined and

so frantic to look, Janus-wise, both up the street and down, that an obliging evolution must have developed eyes in the back of their heads, had nothing occurred to nullify the marshal's ultimatum, and renew the good old régime of the revolver, until its foundations should be battered down by the insipid acids of an effete civilization — to quote a local Fourth of July effusion.

Rapid City had managed to survive about a week of this uncomfortable, negative virtue, when Jesse Bolande, Esquire, rode into town at about four of the afternoon. He had been on his range all week, and as he stood at the unmirrored bar of "Keno Jim's Place," he listened to the new state of affairs with many an oath of incredulous amaze. At his right side, hammer to the front, swung his far-famed .44 extra long revolver. To demand it of him would be calling on Hector to yield up his lance and count himself tamed.

Indeed, had Hector come back from the august companionship of the Shades and stood there at the bar with Bolande, he would have found the American towering over him, more magnificent in every proportion. Into the grip of the Trojan's famed sword Bolande's right paw could not have cramped all its fingers. Upon Bolande's great legs the shin-plates of the well-greaved Greeks would have hung ridiculous with incompetence. Though his training was not theirs, the flesh-hulks of Roman gladiators would have lumbered under his outstretched arm. Numidian cavalrymen would have been flung off in ludicrous disgrace, a dozen different ways in a dozen effective styles, by the tricky broncho wrestler Bolande clung to with amused nonchalance. Around his massy torso the cuirass of a crusader or a Knight of the Table Round would have gaped like the corsets of a society belle. The great two-handed sword that Wallace waved with such dire force, he could have brandished with one hand; he could not have fitted both into the gripe-space. No constriction, no tugging could have fitted upon him the armor of the doughtiest warriors so much sung of by the troubadours. He was the product of all the evolution their centuries of arduous training had furthered.

So Bolande stood, lounging in relaxed might across the grimy little bar, and throwing into his unseared throat glassfuls of liquid fire — that uncongealed lava of a western distillery-volcano.

Suddenly those at the window began to evince genuine excitement, a thing unusual in the more than socially *blasé* cow-punchers, whom a mortal combat hardly galvanizes.

One of them blurted out, smacking his lips Valkyrie-wise in anticipation of magnificent battle: "Watch out, Bolande, the Marshal's comin'."

Bolande shrugged his whole huge frame in contemptuous indifference. Quick upon this heralding came the Marshal's august self. He paused just inside the door and blinked his eyes, an introduction to the dusk of the low-browed room. In the twilight he did not impose an heroic figure. His colossally impressive power saluted you only when the full day brought you a glimpse of a jaw that was not square and phlegmatic, but yet gaunt and nervously firm; of eyes that did not waste their ferocious steel in a set fierceness, and yet gave hint of lurking demons. The Marshal was hardly above medium height. The Marshal was rather below medium weight. His light bones were wrapped with steel wire rather than with ponderous muscles whose bulk is their own hindrance. The Marshal wore a pistol at his side, *ex officio*. His duty demanded it, and no man feared its misuse in the dove-like gentleness of his unoffensed moods.

The Marshal and Bolande were old friends. They had once moiled on a ragged claim upon the mountains together; they had stood back to back in skirmishes with yelling savages in a howling wilderness. And now their youthful mistress, Adventure, had lost charm for them, and they had drawn into the shell that a man in his forties will protect with his life from any encroachment, though he has no desire to make it the base of excursions into other men's preserves. But Bolande and the Marshal were still good friends, bondaged with the golden link of mutual reminiscence.

When the Marshal entered the saloon, he did not, at first, see Bolande's revolver, and there was an unrestrained cordiality in the "How!" with which he greeted him, while the warmth of Bolande's answer strove with a pacificatory uneasiness.

When finally the glint of Bolande's dingy weapon struggled through the smoke of the room to the Marshal's eye, he said quietly, that the others might not hear: "Jesse, stick your gun

behind the bar till you're leavin' town. Can't let you tote your irons in this man's town now."

Perhaps there was too much of the city official and too little of the friend in his tone, for Bolande's look took on a hint of rigor, and there was a tang of defiance in his tone as he tried to laugh out his, "Ownin' this place now, are you, Marshal?"

There was too little subtility in Bolande's intonation to deceive the Marshal in its portent, and he flung back a sharp reply, "Any skin off you, if I do?"

And Bolande calmed before the other's frank resentment and shrugging himself again, murmured: "Nope. But thar'll be some off the man that tries to take my gun away."

Almost pleadingly the quiescent Marshal answered: "Jesse, I'll give you till six o'clock to put up your gun, or pull your freight out of this."

Still more unassumingly, but still more firmly, Bolande answered: "You'll find me right here at six. Bring your nerve with you, Marshal. Have a drink?"

"Don't mind if I do, Jesse. Here's 'how'!" and they drained the martyrdom with unflinching gusto. Then the Marshal turned to leave, and Bolande sang out, with no whit of banter in his tone: —

"So long, Marshal! Six o'clock, is it?"

"Six, Jesse," he answered, with as much of tender appeal in his voice as was possible in a throat made brass with the raw western air, and a heart grown flinty with years of concealed, repressed, and thereby little-known emotion. "Better think it over, Jesse."

Bolande only answered half apologetically: "I'm not heavy on the think," and retrieved himself from tenderness with a blunt, "but I'll be here, six foot two in my socks." The outer day had swallowed the Marshal.

Men hate gossip, but somehow news manages to travel among them with almost the growing rapidity of Vergil's Dame Rumor. So, by the time the little clock behind the bar was getting nervously ready to buzz and clamor the hour of six, the saloon was almost full, while uncouth forms lounged in at the windows and clogged the door. You might have thought a dance was on,

or that some one had come home from a cattle-selling as rich and as drunk as a prince, and eager to scatter free whiskeys like the largess of a coronation day.

The cynosure of all the eyes ambushed behind heavy eyebrows and low-brimmed hats was Bolande, who was again at the bar, rigid and erect as a tower. One hand played a tattoo with his half-emptied glass, the other hovered at the butt of his pistol. He was stolid, yet alert, grim, deadly. The whizz and boom of the striking clock startled every one in the almost noiseless room. The fights of frontiersmen are generally the sudden promptings of an unforeseen rage. Formal, punctual *duello* is rare. Even Bolande was a little nervous and had gulped not infrequent stimulants to whet his nerve and his anger to the nicety of a razor. With knowledge born of lifelong experience, he had equally refrained from drinking himself past the best form.

The Marshal evidently thought it only right to give his old friend three minutes of grace, for it was a little after the hour when his step was heard on the board walk outside. His lean, strong figure was clad in his best broadcloth — he would fight like a gentleman, ready for grave or triumph. That his ready-made suit was much too loose hardly marred the untheatric sublimity of his erect, stern, stubborn, Anglo-Saxon courage. In very modesty he pulled his broad-brimmed hat over the panther blaze of his ruthless glare.

When the Marshal entered the saloon, Bolande waited calmly for his eyes to learn the denser twilight of the room. His hand drew a little nearer his revolver, but forbore to draw it or even clutch its handle.

As the Marshal's searching look made out Bolande's form, and, hunting further, found his pistol undethroned, his teeth set hard upon the last plea of friendship, and with perfectly level voice, he said, inquisitorially calm, "You're still here, I see."

"I'm here," came an answer of equal phlegm.

And though there was a cry of iron rage in his voice, yet was it quiet, as the Marshal declared war thus: "Then, by God, look out for yourself!"

With epic equality and speed the weapons leaped into position.

The spectators, knowing no shots would be wasted, kept only from the immediate neighborhood of the fight. Two semicircles of faint glamour marked the path of the revolvers as they flashed from hip to aim. A spitting of quick fire — two sharp smacks of noise, so twinned that neither eye nor ear could name the earlier — and the revolvers had spoken. Neither in vain.

Bolande fought with his arm swinging freely, his whole body exposed. The Marshal's first bullet bit him in the depth of his chest and whirled him completely about. The next shot lunged into his unwounded side and thrust clean through him.

The Marshal, a little cooler and a little readier for battle, had crooked his left arm into a shield for his heart and lungs, and in its elbow rested his busy revolver. Bolande's first shot went high and, seizing on his chin, carried away the flesh of half his jaw. The second missile flung low and nipped at his right elbow, shattering the joint and shaking the six-shooter from his grasp. As he bent in fierce haste to seize it with his left hand, Bolande shot him through the top of the shoulder, breaking his spine and paralyzing the lower part of him. But even as he quivered to the floor he grasped his revolver and, agonizing into a quick aim, fired again at Bolande.

The bullet fastened on Bolande's left leg and brought the giant thunderously down. And now the desperate Marshal is crying in rabid impotence, "Raise me up, some of you! Raise me up, damn you, and give me another try at the — !"

But Bolande had gathered himself into superb position, prone on the floor, in the old fashion of Indian fighting. His pistol covered his frenzied adversary, and he said, with a paternal quietude of victory: —

"Marshal, I think we've hit our last trail. Neither of us is worth any more lead. Is it quits?"

Then the lust of killing died out of each heart, out of the heart of one in his honorable failure to sustain the sovereignty of the law, out of the heart of the other in his failure to survive trespass on his personal monarchy. And when the savage strength of resolve that supported their wrecked and shattered hulks ebbed out, it left them swooning and unconscious as fainting women.

Almost reverentially the partisans of each lifted his limp majesty from the sticky pool of his own blood, and both were carried upstairs to separate little rooms in the hotel.

Afterwhiles, in the utter rest of lifelessness, and under the crude skill of local physicians, vitality returned to each. To Bolande first, and he asked weakly: —

"Where's the Marshal?"

They whispered him that his late enemy lay in another room — dying.

"I guess I'll go see him," gasped Bolande.

The watchers remonstrated with him, telling him that to move would compel and hasten death. But he persisted with crescent rage.

"I tell you I'm goin' to see him. Lift me up and carry me to where he is, or, by God, I'll rip these bandages off. I'm dyin', too, you damned fools! What do I care for an hour or two more now? He was a game man, wuz the Marshal, and me and him'll cross the Great Divide together."

The power of a man who feared nothing that life or death could bring was not to be resisted; and they obeyed his wish, though with a reluctance as of unwilling murder.

They placed a cot near the Marshal's bed. The only light in the darkened room came sweeping through the curtain, which glowed like a flame. Outside, the red glory of the prairie sunset was thrilling the earth to a responsive flush, as the gaze of a passionate lover brings the color to the cheek of his mistress. Within the room was a greater glory, the austere passing of two granite-couraged heroes. The very evening breeze that trembled at the dingy curtain seemed to sigh at the pity of it.

The sinewy hands of the twain lay clasped outside the coverlet. Bronzed hands they were, now blenching to gray, as the mists of the valley crept up and up.

Bolande, whose pride, thoughtless even now of repentance, had caused the ruin of self as well as friend, was the first to find power for speech in the leaking treasury of his once opulent strength. He put away his own anguish long enough to groan: —

"Are you easy, Marshal?"

"The gruff solicitude of the tone was his only apology for the

dire fruits of his wrath, and all the perfection of its acceptance was the strife at cheer in the Marshal's reply.

"Easy as a kid in a cradle, Jess. How're they comin' on your side?"

"Same here, old man. But I'm goin' fast."

"You won't beat me out five minutes, Jess."

This was their outlook on life, that each had fought for a cause he believed in. Their principles fought, not they. This was their outlook on death, that the unwelcome Inevitable should find no open repugnance in their greeting.

Under the vampire wings of the silence brooding upon the air of the room, the watchers quietly fanned the sweat-jeweled brows of the warriors, throwing their own silent souls into the struggle the twain waged with the dumb wrestler; striving, too, against the mutinous womanliness of grief in their own hard souls.

At length the Marshal looked a request, and one of the men bent over to hear his feeble mutterings, then leaned to the doctor, waiting in merely formal attendance.

A shrill hiss of whispering, and the physician murmured, with dogmatic finality: "Certainly. No use refusin' the wishes of a man what hasn't many more to make. Let 'em have what they like."

The man looked relieved, rose, tiptoed across the creaking planks, and left the room through the protesting door. Another immersion into deepest stillness. Soon he returned with two glasses of whiskey on a cracked plate.

Across the Marshal's face fluttered the wan ghost of a smile, and he spoke between fierce gulps of pain.

"You — stood the — last treat, Jess. Have one — on me — now?"

"Sure,— old hoss!" was the grisly cordiality of the tortured Bolande.

The watchers huddled their rag-limp forms to an erect position, clinked their glasses for them, put the busy life of the glowing liquor to their shivering, ashen lips. And this was Bolande's toast: —

"Better luck — in — the — next country!"

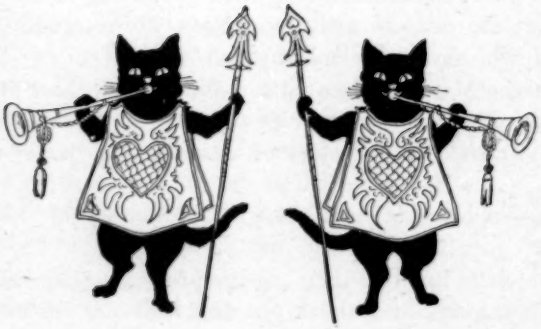
"How!" was the Marshal's acceptance; and they drank with panting effort.

The vigor and bravado of the blood of the corn ran like a prairie fire through their parched and arid frames, and Bolande's voice flung out with spendthrift recklessness: —

"Well, it was a damned good fight, anyway!" He squeezed the Marshal's clammy hand as a last spasm wrung the clay dry of his soul, and he was dead.

A long two minutes of silence smothered life before the Marshal breathed a faintness, half a sigh, half an answering whisper, "Good-by — Jess,— or — is it — how?" And the sands of his life were run.

So they died, stern in wrath, stern in love, with no puny cry of contrition, no wild appeal for mercy beyond the Mystery; each content, rather than proud, that he — and his friend — had died game. They were Americans. With all our faults and all our virtues, both necessary to the unrighteous wrenching of a continent away from its unworthy owners. Of such were the builders of the West.



A Message from Where?

BY L. FRANCIS BISHOP.

WHEN a young lad, I was rummaging one day through an attic filled with broken-down furniture, clothes, books, toys, and odds and ends of every description, which, having long ago served their purpose, were now scattered about these lonely rooms, dust-covered, faded, and forgotten.

At one end of the place, in a corner formed by a gable, I came upon my favorite mystery — an old cedar chest, which had stood there as long as I could recollect, always with the appearance of never having been unlocked. Being a dreamy, imaginative child, I filled the chest with every conceivable horror: children had been murdered and hidden beneath its heavy lid; tortures unspeakable had been inflicted within its neighborhood; the groans of the dead and the shrieks of the dying might, to my excited fancy, be heard in the echoes of the vast, dreary place surrounding it. At times I listened at the keyhole to find if, by some unknown power, those ill-fated infants might not still be living; sometimes I fancied even that I heard rustling whispers, again a sigh, until my blood ran cold with the fancies born of imagination.

Never having been allowed playmates by the grandmother who reared me, I grew to love these ghostly children of my own creation, who gradually came to be my comrades, and the confidants of all my childish sorrows. I was an only child and grandchild, and an orphan, my father and grandfather having been killed while fighting under the flag of the United States for the Union, while my mother had died at my birth.

One day, in my hunger for companionship, I picked up from the street a poor, starving kitten, and carried it home, where, however, I was promptly commanded to drop my newly found treasure into the pond at the foot of the hill. Had they bid me

drop myself into the pond I might very likely have done so, for I was ordinarily an obedient little soul, but the utter helplessness of that shivering little creature roused me to a great resolve. That afternoon I carried the forlorn kitten to the old cedar chest, knowing she would be safe, fancying no one knew of this deserted corner of the attic which I had always regarded as a special discovery of my own, and resolved to guard the secret of my wonderland in my comings and goings by every possible stratagem.

About this time my governess had cause to labor with me over the greasy state of my jacket pockets, but failed to trace their condition to the transmission of some of my own meals to my guest in the attic, who day by day grew sleek and round. Many a game of ball and romps we played, raising about us the dead dust and the ghostly echoes, which contrasted strangely with the gambols and graceful antics of my small companion.

Miss Celia, who was my governess,— if she had another name, I had not heard it,— was tall and thin, with a washed-out appearance, especially about the eyes, which were almost colorless, with heavy red lids, swollen as from weeping, and fringed with pale, sparse lashes; her nose was straight and delicate, her mouth thin, drawn, and pale, while her cheeks were painfully hollow, the bones of the face standing out in unpleasant prominence. I do not recollect that I ever saw her smile, and although she was strict with my lessons, it was in a spiritless way, as if forcing herself for conscience's sake to perform thoroughly and properly a duty in which she had little, if any, interest. During all those years of association I never got nearer her or came to know her better than on the first day when she began my instructions with the A, B, C. As for giving her affection, it never occurred to me; indeed, she seemed to repel the idea of love and tenderness. If the springs of human sympathy had ever gushed through her heart, it seemed to me that the waters must long since have dried up or sunk out of sight.

In the course of time my kitten, much to my delight, arrived at the dignity of having a family. Joy, however, speedily changed to consternation on my discovery of their ability for tumbling off the old chest, and sending up their shrill, small voices in anything but a mild protest. Indeed, it became speedily

apparent that I was in danger of being found out unless I could manage to find them a safer domicile — a problem that haunted me almost hourly, until finally it occurred to me to force open the chest, putting them inside instead of outside. Without stopping to meditate on the possible outcome of this reckless prying into the unknown, I found a hammer and chisel and set to work. At the second blow the hasp flew from the rotten wood.

Lifting the lid, trembling in every part of me, I was first greeted with a fine dust which bore to my nostrils the faint odor of dead violets. Presently, finding courage to open my eyes, I peered cautiously about into the far corners, where the shadows seemed to move, starting at every sound. At last, taking the purring young mother in my arms to gain courage from something warm and living, I bent to look upon the expected horror.

Was I dreaming, or in fairyland? There lay before me a mist of fairy-like ball dresses; laces, which I afterwards learned were of priceless value, silks, brocades, embroideries, and velvets! Young as I was and inexperienced in the price of woman's attire, I knew this was a find of considerable importance; but how came they to be here, why left, and why so neglected, were questions to which I failed to find an answer.

Reverently as if the fairies themselves had laid them there to brighten my lonely childhood, I took them out one by one. How the long ago seemed to exhale itself from their musty folds! Through the clouds of misty lace I almost fancied appeared the form of a woman; what was she like, I wondered. Was she living or dead, dark or fair; tall and radiant, or some small, ethereal creature who quickly passed to another sphere? Had she renounced the world, and vowed herself to poverty and celibacy, leaving all her bravery and finery here to molder and rust away unseen, things of feminine vanity put out of her life forever? Had she no relatives who might value them? Did my grandmother know of the existence of this chest and its contents, or had some pirate hidden it here for safe keeping, unknown to any one? Such were the fancies that crowded through my boyish mind, now alert for almost any romantic discovery. Examining the chest more boldly, I found that into either end there was built a long, shallow box with the lid fastened by brass hooks;

hastily undoing these, I discovered in one a purple morocco case filled with quaint old pieces of jewelry, among which I came upon a large seal ring with a crest; inside the gold was engraved, "From John to Jim." Putting these back in their places, I examined the box in the other side, but here I found what seemed at first only a lot of old letters, yellow with age, and faintly scented with violets.

Closer search, however, revealed at the bottom of the box a small oval case covered with faded violet velvet and fastened by an unseen spring that for several minutes resisted my clumsy fingers, trembling with delicious apprehension. But even my most romantic imaginings had failed to prepare me for the dreamlike loveliness of that face, exquisitely painted on ivory, that laughed back at me as the case disclosed its secret.

I had found, indeed, the fairy of the old chest! Peeping out from the fair ringlets of long ago, that oval face of fresh young maidenhood, those laughing blue eyes, luminous with the light that shines from an untroubled soul, that delicate nose and chin curving into the rounded cheek, those full, red, parted lips, dimpling away from the small white teeth, all held me enthralled. Opposite was the pictured face of a man. It was years before I understood the strength and magnetism of this man's face.

But, boy though I was, for the next five or six years of my life I was completely absorbed by the pictured beauty of the woman. At first she took the form of a fairy, risen from the ashes of the old chest; then a new fancy seized me, and I determined, when grown to manhood, to search the world for that face's owner, and when found to make her my wife.

Another favorite playground with me, especially when the fruit trees were ripening, was an old family burial-ground, a short distance back of the stables and now converted into an orchard. On some of the tombstones the dates ran back over two hundred years, and, with one or two exceptions, the stones were crumbly, dilapidated, and either fallen or tottering earthward; while the names and lettering on many of them were worn nearly smooth by the action of time and weather. It was a place almost as silent and deserted out-of-doors as the old attic was within.

About five or six years after the finding of the pictures, I came home from college for the summer holidays, having long ago outgrown the leading-strings of a governess. For some reason, unknown to me, however, Miss Celia still remained with us. Indeed, she had always been treated like one of the family, my grandmother showing great affection for her, although she was no kindred of ours.

Meantime the pictured face of the chest had continued to exert its old fascination over me, a fascination now strongly tinged with curiosity. Who was she? Where had she come from, and whence gone? were questions I asked in vain until one night, when, after the household had retired, I was seized with the impulse to play one of my boyish pranks, and stole softly out to the graveyard in search of fruit.

As I was reaching for some fine summer apples hanging over my head, I was startled by a groan, and instantly frozen into that position by a creeping, horrible fear; slowly my arms fell without volition of my own, and the next moment I dropped to the earth in a swoon of terror.

How long I lay there with my face buried in the damp, dew-wet grass I could not tell; but gradually I became conscious of another presence near me, and a presence of great suffering. First, I heard a sigh,— so sad and mournful it was like to break my own young heart to hear it,— followed by a woman's low, despairing sobs, so keen in their intensity of despair and pain that I found the courage to raise my head, and the impulse to go to her assistance, be she real or phantom.

But before I could struggle to my feet I heard a voice thrilling with an agony of longing cry: "Jim! Jim! Can you know now how I loved you, and how bitterly have expiated my sin in driving you to your death?"

For a moment only the tense and terrible grief of those despairing words penetrated my consciousness. The next instant something familiar in the tone sent me stumbling hastily in the direction of the sound. Yes, it was as I had thought,— the voice was the voice of Miss Celia! It was my old governess, who, late at night, wept alone in the deserted graveyard, where I had never seen her before. Was she asleep and walking through a dream,

or had she lost her reason? She was kneeling beside a grave at some distance from me, where the starlight fell soft and clear about her; again I heard her voice murmuring in an agony of prayer: "O God, how long before I lay my aching heart upon his breast to be at rest?" As I gazed upon her pale, worn face upturned to the faint, ghostly light, I felt that I rested very near the borderland between the living and the dead. Whatever her trouble, it went deep and was embittered with a touch of remorse. Turning quietly, I stole softly back to the house, that she might not know I had witnessed her sorrow.

The next day, having been vexed all night with the question, "Who was Jim?" I sought the grave where I had seen her kneeling the night before, and found a gray granite stone with this inscription: —

"JAMES G. FURGESON.

A MAN OF GREAT COURAGE, WHO COULD AFFORD TO BE MISUNDERSTOOD."

"James G. Furgeson!" Why, that was my own name! I pinched myself to see if I were really alive, or lying there dead and buried. It would give a creepy sensation to the stoutest-hearted man to stand beside a grave, and unexpectedly find his own name staring at him from the head of it. And this man with my own name was a man of courage, while I — well, I had never dreamed there was a grain of courage in my composition, until one occasion in my college life, which surprised me even more than it did my classmates. But who was this other James G. Furgeson? I had never heard him spoken of, and supposed myself the only one of that name. After puzzling over the matter for a good half hour I determined to ask "Mammy," my old black nurse, who had grown up with grandmother and knew all the family history; had there been such a man, she would know all about him. But on hearing my eager inquiry Mammy said only: "Shu-u-u, honey chile! Done yo' go fur to mention hees name in dis yere house, 'less yo' wants ter make yo' granmudder heap sor'ful: dat name ain' spoke no mo' cose it gwine make mo' en one heart hebby 'roun' yere. Now mine wut I tole yo', en

done yo' ax no mo' questions 'bout dat name. Does yo' hyear wat I'se tollen yo'?"

Plainly there was nothing to be gained from Mammy.

The following day Miss Celia was ill, they said; the doctor came, shaking his head gravely. I had never felt any affection for her, being rather repelled by her unattractive appearance and cold manner; but the glimpse I had caught that night of a deep and terrible suffering took strong hold upon me, and I felt a great sympathy for this poor, lonely creature who had guided my first hesitating steps along the path of learning.

For two days after this it rained steadily, a dull, drizzling, depressing kind of rain. The horses and dogs had failed to interest me. "Jim! Jim! Who was 'Jim'?" kept calling through my brain. Finally, going to the house, I sought Mammy and once more made an effort to coax from her an explanation.

"Go way frum dar, chile! ain' I done tole yo' dat yo' got nuffin ter do wid dat story? Does yo' 'spose, 'cose yo's gwine ter dat college, dat yo' is too big fo' me ter whoop yo' en make yo' mine me, wen I tole yo' shet up bout suffin? Yo' fine dat yo' ole mammy kin han'le yo' yit."

Giving Mammy a pinch on her fat arm, and dodging her right hand, which was aimed for a box of the ear, I made my way to the attic, where once more I studied the lovely features of my first and thus far only love.

I found the face unchanged; the same sweetness lingered about the mouth, the eyes still smiled back into mine with an innocent merriment, the long, fair curls nestled against the exquisitely rounded cheek, no sorrow marked the pictured face.

O happy, beautiful love of the long ago, where time made no heartrending changes!

Again I took from its purple morocco case the seal ring, again read the inscription "From John to Jim."

"Jim!" That name haunted me, following and facing me everywhere. John was my father's name, and Jim belonged to me. Who was this other Jim? Why must I ask no questions about him? In some unaccountable way I seemed to be near and dear to both names; while the ring itself, when I touched it, brought to me a presence I never had known, yet felt in every fiber of my

being. Was it a relative? or my father, who was killed before my birth? or the broken-hearted mother whose life passed away in giving me mine? What is this feeling of something near, yet ever beyond me? a something intangible of companionship in my loneliness, a touch of the now and here with the past and hereafter? What is this thing which almost speaks to my soul, yet eludes and escapes my physical consciousness at the moment it wakens it, an unknown, vanishing memory?

Carrying some of the old letters to the dim light which fell through small dust-covered panes in the top of the gable, I sought the knowledge of my picture-love through their medium. The first one I read, which bore a date in the fall of '63, was written in a firm, bold hand, and began as follows: —

"Dear and ever dear you are to me, my love, but what you ask is impossible. Your sister is fortunate, as you say, in having married a Southron.

"That I was so blessed in winning your love seems strange to me yet. I have but one regret at present,— that of bringing some pain into your life, where I would have nothing but brightness and happiness, which of right seems only to belong to you; otherwise, how immeasurably happy I am.

"When I look forward to the future and anticipate the coming years with you by my side, thinking of the pride my mother will feel in the beautiful daughter of the South I am bringing her, I can scarcely — "

Here the faded paper was torn, and the rest of the letter missing.

The next one was in a woman's fine old-time handwriting, bearing a later date.

"*Dear Jim:* — You say you love me; you also claim to be a man of courage; if that be true, 'courage' must be spelled and read differently in the North than we know it in the South; here we are loyal to our friends and those we claim to love, not in protestation, but in deed. I am a Southern woman from the heart out, and will never marry a man who takes up arms against me and my people.

"If you really loved me, you would join our soldiers and fight for me and my home; since you refuse, I must either think you do not love me, or that you are a coward.

"We need every man we can get in the field; I would rather see you there *dead* than here living, knowing you without courage. Yours,

"CELIA."

Dated — The Pine Plantation, Ga.

In the envelope was another letter penned by the same hand as the first one.

"*My Celia:* — For the last time I may call you so. My love for you has been so great that it held me here until too late to join my father and brother in the North, where I should be now fighting by their side for the old flag under which we all were born, North and South alike; think you I could fire upon it?

"As you know, my father is a Northern man, my mother a Southern woman; while I was born and reared in the North, my mother's blood in me has always yearned for the South. You ask me to do what you would not do yourself, — take up arms against the land where I was born, and a long line of sires before me; to fire upon the flag that floated over my cradle. And much as I love you, I refuse to do so. You cannot believe me a coward, or you would never have given me your love.

"To-night I find my first relief from this terrible inaction and your injustice. The package which accompanies this letter will be delivered to you when you are safely conducted within the city limits. I remain here to try and protect your home from a band of blacks and white men who have planned attacking it to-night. I have known this for some time, and am proud to say there is not a Northern man among them. My one anxiety has been to place you and your sister in a place of safety, keeping the knowledge from you.

"There are only three of us, two old men and myself, against large numbers; the result is certain; but at least I know that here my duty is not conflicting, and points straight ahead of me. Do you understand now why I pleaded so hard for the farewell kiss which you refused me?

"It is impossible at this time to foretell how this war will terminate; but should it go against the South, the day will come when you may need friends. I ask you, when the war is over, to take my body home and have it placed in the old burial-ground where I played when a boy. I need say no more for your guidance; they will know what to do in the old homestead at the North where some day I had hoped to carry you, a bride.

"O my darling, how my heart goes out to you in longing to comfort you in your hour of sorrow! How I wish you had known me better! We men of the North may seem cold, but are not without courage, and know how to love as well as fight.

"I send you the ring brother John gave me when I came of age. Carry it back to him, if he still lives; if not, keep it.

"Good-by, and may God watch over us all this night, both North and South alike.

"Faithfully yours in life or death,

"JAMES G. FURGESON."

This letter was marred with the stain of tears, being in places so blurred that many of the words had to be guessed at or fitted in. On the back, in a woman's trembling hand, was written, "They brought him to me the next day, riddled with bullets. Dead! dead! O my love! my love!"

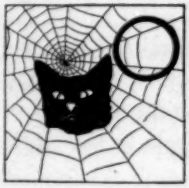
Softly, reverently, I laid away the faded old letters. To have read more would have seemed a sacrilege. I seemed to have stepped into an open grave. At last I understood.

Stealing downstairs, I found the doctor going and my grandmother weeping. Turning with a sudden impulse, I ran to Miss Celia's room. But even before I crossed the threshold I knew what I should find within. At last God had answered her prayer, and she lay at rest, her face transfigured by the only happy expression I had ever seen her wear.

As the light fell over the poor, worn face I stooped and pressed a kiss on the dead lips of my first and unknown love, whispering as I did so, "For Jim!"

The Man with the Box.

BY GEORGE W. TRIPP.



IN a certain quiet corner, one Cahill keeps a cozy snuggery to which I am partial — especially when returning from an up-country outing. One sultry evening in July, I arrived at his place at the hour of 10 P. M., somewhat used up, for I had passed a busy day on my wheel over a country road since dawn, making kodak notes of certain views I needed for future reference. Entering my favorite restaurant, I gave a generous order and devoted myself to the matter of refreshment. Supper over, I ordered another bottle of the beer I had been drinking with my lunch, and lighting a cigar, sat at luxurious ease, too tired even to glance over the evening paper that lay on my table.

As I sat drowsily smoking, my attention was attracted by the noise of a moving chair in my rear. I turned somewhat suddenly, to find sitting at the table behind me a peculiar-looking person. He was possessed of a long, narrow face that was half buried in a heavy, iron gray beard of extraordinary length. His eyebrows, of the same color as his beard, were bushy and bristling, and meeting in the center of the line of his nose, gave to his face an air of concentrated purpose, borne out by a pair of keen, glittering eyes that peered sharply from beneath them.

"Kodakist?" queried he, with the brusque, familiar air of one who eschewed conventionalities, as he caught my eye.

"I am an artist, sir!" I replied stiffly. His undue familiarity annoyed me.

"Ah, indeed? A distinction without much difference, in my mind; — they're essentially quite the same — "

"Not at all the same!" I rejoined, ruffling.

"Pardon me, — no doubt you think so; but, after all, it's a mere matter of one's point of view. Did it ever strike you, when

thinking of these matters, how few are the primal principles on which are based the innumerable inventions of modern times?"

"Can't say I've thought much about it!" I tartly replied, sipping my beer and wondering how to rid myself of this preposterous bore.

"For instance, as an artist, you are very likely aware of the recent successful experiments in photographing color?"

I nodded in cold affirmation.

"Then you are probably aware it is generally admitted that the differentiation of one color from another to the eye is occasioned simply by the fact that each color imparts a different number of vibrations to the second of the ray of light it reflects to the optic nerve?"

I admitted a knowledge of this theory.

"Very well; you are possibly also aware that the difference between one tone and another, in musical sounds, lies merely in the different number of air vibrations to the second produced by each respective sound?"

I intimated that I was also aware of this fact.

"Very well; here we have two quite diverse channels through which the principle of the sensibility of the nervous system to vibratory impressions operates."

"Well, what of it?" I asked impatiently, as he paused and sat regarding me with his bright, glittering eyes.

"Simply this: why should not the sense of taste be referred to this same principle?"

He arose as he spoke, and drew from under his table a small box. Bringing it over, he placed it carefully on my table, after which, without apology, he removed my kodak from where it lay near my elbow, to the floor beneath, and seated himself, unasked, opposite me. The box was of cubical shape, made of some fine, richly grained wood, and polished till it shone like the cherry-topped table at which we were sitting. Pivoted on the top of it was an arrow-headed index hand, made of brass and about four inches in length. The side of the box facing me was studded with a row of brass push-buttons.

"Kodakist?" queried I, ironically, returning his first question.

"No, my dear sir, I am not; neither am I a confidence man;

nor am I, as your manner might seem to imply, even what you Americans term a 'crank.' But," said he, suddenly leaning forward and tapping himself briskly on the forehead, "I do confess to a degree of enthusiasm over a certain discovery of mine — an enthusiasm you will presently share if you will give me a few moments of your leisure."

My distaste for the fellow was not lessening; but his speech was civil in its way, and his brusque, eccentric ways amused me. I write occasionally for the press. Here was a character, and I resolved to study him a bit. I rapped for the waiter.

"Excuse me, sir," said my peculiar companion, as the knight of the apron appeared; "it is my privilege first, I believe, under the circumstances. Waiter!" he added, tossing a silver dollar down on the table, "two glasses of water, please."

That functionary stared.

"Sir?" quoth he, with mouth open.

"Two glasses of water, please, and there's something for your trouble."

The sight of the money seemed to restore the waiter's equilibrium, for, picking it up, he felt of it, put it in his pocket, and retired with chin elevated. In a moment he reappeared with two glasses of water, deposited them on the table, winked at me, and again retired with chin still elevated.

"Rather mild potation you've ordered," I observed, with a quizzical glance at my eccentric companion.

"The water?" said he somewhat absently, as he blew the dust from the throat of a small key; "oh, that's all right; you shall drink your favorite beverage presently."

Carefully fitting the key into some aperture in the side of the box facing him, he turned it a little, as if to try the wards; then, pushing the box aside, he suddenly leaned forward, fixed on me his peculiar eye, and abruptly asked: —

"Are you not possessed of a somewhat vivid imagination?"

I acknowledged to being endowed with a fair share of that faculty.

"Do you not write for the press occasionally?"

I admitted that I was something of a scribe.

"So I thought, so I thought," said he, tapping the box thought-

fully; "an artist — a man of letters — a person of imagination. Just the person I seek. But talking is dry work, particularly to a listener. Let us first drink," continued he, pushing one of the glasses of water towards me.

"Oh, really, you must excuse me," I demurred, with a furtive eye on the box, which I began to distrust, "water after beer — I couldn't, you know — and — "

"Oh, bother the water," he impatiently interrupted, suddenly turning the box around and pushing it over to me.

In the side of the box that had been facing him was set a large glass-covered dial, around the margin of which was printed, in small characters, a number of words, radiating in the alignment of their letters from the center. In this central point of the dial was pivoted an index hand, the finger of which at present rested on a blank space which broke the circle of printed words. I bent closer to examine these characters. To my surprise, I found they constituted a remarkably complete list of the most popular of the beverages known to the bibulous world. The more noted brands of ale, beer, brandy, whisky, rum, and gin appeared, together with many of the most celebrated vintages of wines. There was also listed a number of the fancy drinks so dear to the American heart. The milder beverages found place, too, — both hot and cold, — even water being included. Beneath the dial was inserted, in a small hole, the key the man had just been manipulating.

I looked up inquiringly. "Name your beverage," said he.

"If you mean that I am to name a favorite beverage from that list, why, I should say Bass' ale," I replied, somewhat puzzled.

"Very well," said he; "kindly turn that key till you see that the indicator above points to the words 'Bass' ale.'"

I complied.

"Take up your glass!"

I obeyed.

Swiftly drawing the box to him, he turned the brass arrow on its top till it pointed at me, and then pressed one of the push-buttons.

"Look at your glass!"

I turned my gaze from the box to the glass that I held in my hand. To my amazement, instead of water, there shimmered in

it with an oily bead an amber-hued beverage, most uncommonly like, in appearance, the ale I had just been drinking.

"Taste of it," said my strange acquaintance.

I tasted it — though somewhat gingerly.

"Bass' ale!" I exclaimed, astounded.

"Yes," he observed, with an air of satisfaction, "and, as you'll find, a particularly fine brew."

Curious to investigate this novel trick, I took a few moderate sips of the stuff. The fellow was right. I am somewhat of a connoisseur of fine ales, and I found this one excellent.

"A capital trick! I perceive you to be a master of the art," I observed smilingly.

"A paltry dabbler in legerdemain?" he exclaimed with irritation. "I had attributed to you a finer perception than this. I am aware that in person and manner I may seem eccentric, but, believe me, these appearances are not the fruit of an ill-balanced head or an evil heart. They are the ugly crusts, so to speak, begotten of bitter experiences and deferred hopes."

He sat silently regarding me for a moment, and then continued: —

"Sir, I have a brief story to tell, and a proposition to make to you. Whether or not you accept the latter, you are confessedly a knight of the pen, and may find some use to make of the former; will you listen?"

The fellow really was getting interesting. I nodded my willingness to hear him.

"I am," he continued, "by profession a model maker. I was brought up to the business, and, having a natural aptitude for the work, came to be counted among the best in my line. Having an original turn of mind, together with a natural facility of execution, I made a specialty of developing the crude ideas of inventors who lacked the technical knowledge and practical experience necessary successfully to complete their various conceptions. Thrown, thus, in contact with minds groping along original lines with more or less cleverness, my own ingenuity was stimulated, and I was led, at last, into a line of original investigation and experiment that resulted in a most wonderful discovery.

"Even to outline clearly to you the nature and methods of

these researches and experiments would take too much time. Suffice it to say that the flower of my discovery stands before you in that box. In that polished cube of wood is incrusted a marvelous device, equal in importance to the telephone, typewriter, phonograph, or any other of the mighty group of great modern inventions.

"You look incredulous; but I assure you my words are well advised, as I shall presently demonstrate to your entire satisfaction.

"This wonderful little apparatus that stands before you, I call a Universal Beverage Differentiator. By a proper manipulation of its mechanism, in conjunction with a certain exertion of psychological power on the part of the operator, any beverage held or recently touched by a person within a radius of sixty feet of the box, and at whom this projector on top may at the time be pointed, will, to that person's sight and taste, be converted to any beverage indicated at the moment by the pointer of this dial that you see set in the side. Moreover, the impression will hold good until neutralized by the action of certain parts of the apparatus, that, when brought into play by the operator, serve to dispel the hallucination."

As the stranger paused, as if waiting for me to remark upon his strange disclosure, I took a long breath, tossed away my cigar, sat upright, and, like a sensible cosmopolitan, laughingly observed, "Rats!"

The stranger frowned.

"You choose to be facetious," he dryly remarked; "I might, however, rejoin that, in this case, it seems to me that 'Snakes' answers all purposes equally as well," added he, pointing to a name on the dial.

I bent closer and examined it. Amidst the list of beverages was printed, in smaller characters than the others — as if to render it inconspicuous — the word "Snakes."

For an instant, I looked at it in stolid wonder. Then suddenly I surmised its ostensible function. Sitting back in my chair, I regarded my strange companion for a moment in silence; then, putting back my head, I exploded in a fit of laughter.

"Well," said I, as I recovered my breath, "my friend, all I've

got to say is, that if you conjure up snakes as cleverly as you seem to change beverages, you hold the key to considerable sport in your hands."

"To a better purpose than that of mere sport, I should hope," he somewhat gravely replied. "But if you are as incredulous as your words would imply, it seems to me it would be but justice, at least, to give me a chance to demonstrate beyond dispute that what I have related of this box is literally true."

I intimated that I was willing, "providing," I added, with a laugh, "you don't turn on the snakes."

"You may rest assured as to that, sir. Although," he added, with some gravity, "should I do so, you would find it no laughing matter.

"And now, pray mention some wine of which you are particularly fond," said he.

I named a certain sherry I had observed on the dial, and of which I am very fond. Hardly had he swept the indicator to the place, when the pale amber of the ale before me deepened to the ruddy brown of the wine I had called for.

Taking up the glass, I smelled of the stuff, then tasted it. Unquestionably, so far as my physical senses evidenced, it was the brand of sherry I had named.

I set down my glass and regarded my companion with a puzzled look.

"My friend," I dryly observed, "these transformations, on the face of them, appear quite marvelous; but any clever master of legerdemain will do things apparently as wonderful. I shall be glad to be convinced of the truth of your extraordinary statements; but for anything you've shown me as yet, these curious phenomena may be but an adroit piece of chemical jugglery."

The stranger listened with an impatient frown. Then his countenance cleared.

"Sir," said he, "under the circumstances, your doubts are natural. Though it is not my intention that you shall go from here to-night unconvinced, any test involving immediate publicity of my discovery would be fatal to certain cherished purposes of mine. For the present, it is imperative that the strictest secrecy be observed in this matter; and though you may wonder some-

what at my sudden confidence in a perfect stranger, I am not so unsophisticated as may appear, and know, in a way that would surprise you, that my trust is not misplaced.

"Now, I would propose as a test both simple and crucial, that you operate the box yourself on the next person who may drink at one of these tables. With ordinary discretion, no suspicion need be aroused as to the source of the hallucinations, and on the success of the experiment I am willing to stake my chances of convincing you."

I bit my lips and smiled.

"Your words are more flattering than convincing," I replied, "but I've no objections to such an experiment."

"Very well," said the stranger; "and now listen," he continued, with one finger held up by way of emphasis. "I must briefly explain the method of operating the box. In the first place, it is essential that the operator should be possessed of sufficient imagination to recall at will the taste, odor, and appearance of the beverage he may desire to project into the imagination of the drinker. It is not necessary that this mental picture be powerful on the part of the operator. The faintest suggestion in his mind of the desired effects will suffice, as certain plates in the apparatus — brought respectively into play by the dial indicator — are so constructed as powerfully to develop this mental effort of the operator; while what, for the sake of convenience, I will call the projecting current, conveys these effects through this brass arrow on top into the nervous economy of any person at whom it may be pointed, and who may be drinking any liquid within a radius of sixty feet of the box, — providing, of course, the indicator in the side dial be set at the name of the imagined beverage. Now this row of push-buttons which you observe set in the side of the box regulates the strength of the hallucinations. The first one on the left gives a very powerful impression; the one next it a milder one, and so on down to the sixth and last, which gives a very faint effect.

"By the way, it is not necessary that the projector be held on the subject, once it lines up with him. It suffices simply to sweep it past him. The impression he will thus receive will remain until dispelled by the action of the neutralizing mechanism, which

is operated by these two large buttons set in the end of the box. When the operator desires to neutralize the effects of the apparatus on a subject, he simply lines him up again with the projector and presses the white button. Or, if several persons are under influence, he may break the spell with all of them simultaneously by pressing the red button, which does not necessitate the use of the projector in conjunction with it. Thus, you see, the operation of the box is extremely simple; and I should be very glad if you would put it to any test these instructions may have suggested."

I had followed him through these details with a grave countenance. Inwardly I was convulsed with a curious mixture of wonder and mirth. If only a clever fakir, what possible lay could the fellow be on? Perhaps a matter of a desired loan on the alleged apparatus. Still, for a confidence game, the plant seemed unnecessarily elaborate. Juggling so clever as this would be a goose which would lay more golden eggs in legitimate paths than in crooked ones.

"My friend," I observed, scanning him sharply, "as I've said, your proposition of a test seems made in good faith. If sincere, you, of course, will not object to my trying these experiments without your presence, I suppose?"

To my surprise, he rose at once.

"None at all, sir; in fact, I was about to propose such an arrangement myself," he frankly replied. "I will absent myself for an hour from these premises," added he, glancing at his watch. "That will give you time to experiment to your satisfaction. But before going, I would say that while I want you thoroughly to satisfy yourself in this matter, you will see, I am sure, the necessity of keeping within judicious bounds. A hint to a person of your discretion should be enough."

"Oh, and one thing more: try any plate named in the list, but as you value your life, don't tamper with the 'snake' plate;—remember! have nothing to do with it!"

During the latter part of this conversation, a lull in the evening trade of the place had left us alone. At this juncture, however, a gentleman entered, bowed smilingly to me and, passing on to another table, ordered some sandwiches and a glass of milk. I

knew him as a promising young physician who was strongly opposed to the use of stimulating beverages.

My companion leaned over to me with twinkling eyes.

"There's a subject for you," he whispered; "try him! Here comes his lunch," he added, rising, "and as you seem to have understood correctly my instructions, I now will leave you to experiment to your satisfaction by yourself;" then, nodding me "good-evening," he withdrew.

I was nonplussed.

I had so far doubted the fellow's sincerity in desiring a genuine investigation of his alleged discovery; but there of course could be no possible collusion in this case.

How would he get out of it? His audacity amused me. I would humor his game till I saw its point, at least. Under cover of the evening paper, I set the indicator of the box at "milk punch." Then, waiting till my medical acquaintance reached for his glass of milk, I pushed the No. 1 button, called up the proper mental picture, and slowly lined him up with the brass projector.

It was not without an anticipatory thrill that I did this, and then I smiled at my absurd perturbation. The stranger would very likely return presently, and, alleging an improper manipulation on my part in excuse of the failure of the experiment, defer his straw test until the arrival of some confederate who would enable him to effect a "fake" demonstration for my benefit.

As these thoughts were passing through my mind, the doctor suddenly pulled out his watch.

"I declare," he called to me, "I had nearly forgotten an engagement I have for this very hour!"

Rising hurriedly, he caught up his glass and took a hasty gulp. Hardly had the beverage passed his lips ere he slammed the glass down on the table, caught himself by the throat, and snorted, coughed, and choked as if he had swallowed vitriol.

I sprang to my feet and stepped over to him.

"What's the matter, doctor?" I asked in dismay, catching him by the arm.

"Matter?" he wheezed between his snorts and expectorations; "I ordered a glass of milk, and they've sent me in milk punch!

Just taste of that, sir!" said he furiously, picking up the glass and handing it to me.

I smelled it, tasted it. It was milk — and nothing but milk! Not the faintest trace of any other taste or odor.

For a moment I stood confused. Then I pulled my wits together.

"Doctor," said I, dumping the contents of the glass into a cuspidore, "I am at fault myself. I just now ordered a milk punch for the person you saw sitting at my table as you entered. He has stepped out for a moment, and the waiter has made a natural error. I must beg a thousand pardons."

The doctor — by nature a pleasant fellow — had by this time somewhat recovered. His countenance cleared, he laughed good-humoredly, and expressed regret at having shown temper over a trifle. Nodding me a pleasant good-evening, he hastily departed to his engagement.

I resumed my seat, and sat regarding the mysterious box before me with an odd mixture of feelings. My manipulation of this apparently potent apparatus had been conducted, so far, in a spirit of skeptical levity, but my last experiment had put another face on the matter. I began to feel a little nervous about making further experiments on my own responsibility.

Throwing the evening paper over the box, I sat doubtfully considering the matter, when a couple of tough-looking characters swaggered in. Taking seats at a table, they ordered some beer and sandwiches, over which they proceeded to discuss the contents of a scrap of paper which one of them had produced.

Others now began to drop in, and, shaking off my nervous doubts, I gave my attention to a judicious manipulation of the box under cover of my paper.

Up to this time, I still had been obstinately possessed of a suspicion that the effects apparently produced by this alleged apparatus — even in the doctor's case — had been but a clever piece of legerdemain. The marvelous hallucinations that invariably seemed to follow every trial I made with this mystic battery were too much for my skepticism. I found my doubts resolving into a critical enthusiasm, and I entered upon further experiments with a wondering and growing delight in the occult powers of

this cube of potent mechanism. In short, without exception, they confirmed all that had been claimed for this apparatus by its inventor, and created a degree of confusion in the mind of Cahill's phlegmatic head waiter that, I think, had never been visited on that organ before.

Before long I saw that I was going too far with this sort of thing. Relighting my cigar, I leaned back in my chair and awaited the stranger's return with impatience. Convinced, from what I had seen, of the veracity of his statements, I was now burning with curiosity to know the nature of the proposition he had to make me.

I had, so far, refrained from tampering with the "snake plate." As I sat waiting, I found my thoughts persistently reverting to this forbidden fruit. The unpleasant sensation which I at first experienced upon thought of it gradually grew duller with each recurrence of the matter, and, in place of aversion, there presently arose an itching curiosity to try this plate. However, the stranger's warning was yet in my ears, and I had seen enough by this time to convince me that he was sincere and knew whereof he spoke.

And yet — was not there the mild button? I had tried the brandy plate on myself with this button set, and found it reduced the hallucination to a mere shadow of effects. I would try the forbidden plate with it! on myself, of course — possible consequences forbade other experiment.

Disencumbering the box of the paper I had so far kept over it, I pushed the mild button, set the indicator at the forbidden point, and with one finger held prudently over the neutral button, slowly turned the projector till it bore full on me. Reaching out my left hand to my glass, which I had previously refilled from a fresh bottle of Bass' ale, I somewhat hesitatingly touched it. At the same time I mentally conjured up a mild type of a garter snake.

As my fingers touched the glass, I was suddenly seized with a qualm of nervous apprehension; but bracing myself for a possible shock, I firmly grasped it and pulled it to me.

For a moment I observed nothing. With an odd feeling of relief I was about to re-examine the dial, thinking I had made some

error, when I was startled to find my gaze irresistibly drawn back to my glass by an overpowering fascination. The color of its contents was changing. From a pleasant amber it was rapidly passing to an ugly, venomous green; and as I looked, two bubbles of the liquid's bead detached themselves from opposite sides of the glass and circled slowly to its center, where, instead of uniting, as bubbles in proximity usually do, they remained a little apart without further tendency to rotate.

Suddenly it came to me, with a sickening sensation, that they were not bubbles, but a pair of small, glittering eyes that now seemed regarding me from the depths of the beverage. For they sank as I looked; and then — horrors! — they enlarged to two great, frightful orbs that seemed to fasten my gaze with bands of fire. Slowly they began to circle about the bottom of the glass; then faster and faster they spun, until my brain reeled and my head felt like a humming top. At last, so rapidly they whirled, they seemed one bright wheel of baleful, glittering light, which, presently paling to a dull, sickly hued ring, swung slower and slower, finally fading away in the green-hued contents of the glass.

A simple matter to describe — but I had had quite enough. My ears were ringing; an iron band seemed drawn tightly about my head; a reddish mist impinged on my eyesight, and I felt the cold perspiration running from every pore.

I was about to press the neutral button, when I started back with a suppressed cry. In place of the arrow-headed pointer on the top of the box, there twisted and squirmed a hideous green and gray adder! The shock to my nervous system was something frightful; but even in the distraction of the moment, I realized it was not so much this one apparition of an adder that unnerved me, as it was the horrible dread of what might appear next.

With a powerful effort of my will, I reached a trembling hand to the cut-off button, and pressed it just in time to shut off a row of small wriggling vipers which the row of buttons on the side seemed simultaneously projecting.

"And that's the effect of that plate with but the mild button set!" I mentally ejaculated, wiping the cold perspiration from

my face with my handkerchief, and glancing furtively about the room. As I did so, I caught the eyes of one of the seedy pair of toughs fixed on me with a queer, insolent look. My nerves were yet tingling from my recent experience. I felt irritable and ugly, and I returned his stare with interest.

"Look at de cully dude over dere, piping us off wid his kodak," said he to his chum.

"Say, Cholly," said that personage, turning about in his chair and holding up to me the sole of one of his big feet, "jess put de machine ter work on dat, and den git der picter framed ter mine me by, — see?"

I knew a word to the waiter would suffice to rid me of the pair. But it suddenly occurred to me that here was an opportunity to utilize the powers of the apparatus to some purpose. I would give these fellows a lesson they'd never forget to their dying day. The indicator of the dial was still set at "snakes." I had but to press the No. 1 button and call up the proper mental picture, to turn the full power of that terrible plate through the projector, which, as the box now stood, pointed at the wall on my left.

I had just attended to these preliminaries, when Cahill entered and walked down to them, evidently to order them out. But I was resolved not to let them off so easily. Hastily turning the projector, I lined them up just before he reached them.

The effect was instantaneous. With a yell, they both sprang to their feet. The next instant, one fell writhing to the floor, while the other came rushing towards the swing door, his face distorted and the foam flying from his mouth. As he neared me, he suddenly threw up his hands and fell across my table, striking the box, as he fell, with such force as to send it flying under the swing door out into the bar beyond.

The next moment pandemonium reigned!

As the box went rolling along, a chorus of agonized shrieks sounded through the room.

In falling it had swept the occupants of the place with its terrible current!

Indeed, it was only by a miracle of chance that I had not been caught in its radius as the box rolled.

In an instant the room was one struggling mass of delirious humanity. Some rolled on the floor in frightful convulsions, — others, in their frenzy, grappled together and tore at each others' throats like wild beasts!

I sat for a moment paralyzed with horror. Then I realized that in my attempt at a joke I had brought upon at least a dozen respectable citizens delirium tremens in their most horrible form! This brought me to my senses. The box must be recovered at all hazards and its fearful effects neutralized! I sprang to my feet and leaped through the swing door.

The box was nowhere in sight!

A waiter, white with fright, was clinging to the door-post of the street entrance, shouting for the police.

"The box! where's the box?" I cried.

"He's — he's got it, sir!" said he in a frightened stutter.

"Got it! who's got it?"

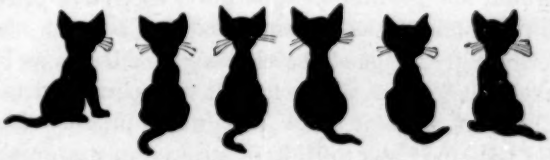
"Why, just as it rolled against the bar, in came the crank that brought it here. Grabbing it, he pressed one of the buttons, and then, 'Great heavens!' he yelled, 'the fool has broken the neutralizer. I can shut off the current but not the effects!' and with that he clapped it under his coat and rushed out."

My predicament was a desperate one!

The stranger undoubtedly would seek, by flight, to evade all responsibility for the frightful consequences of my folly.

He must be found at all costs!

Appalled at the frightful position in which I had placed myself, I rushed into the street in wild pursuit. But my efforts were vain. And since then, though I have exhausted every expedient in my despairing search, not the slightest trace has been found of the mysterious inventor — "the man with the box."



What the Moon Saw.

BY ISABELLE MEREDITH.

IN the autumn of 1891 I was advised by my physician to pass a portion of the winter in the South. After much searching I decided upon Asheville, North Carolina, as the most desirable place in which to recuperate. A few days later, accordingly, I started for the South; and when I reached Henry's, which was at that time the railroad terminus, and stepped off the train, my hand was grasped heartily by my old friend, Doctor Mason, who had been advised of my coming, and whom I had not met for some years.

"How long shall you remain here?" was his first question.

"Only to dine, and then go on the stage to Asheville this afternoon," I replied.

"Oh, come now; stay over one night and I promise you some rare sport after the moon rises."

Having no plans to be upset by this change, I agreed to spend the night in the quaint but comfortable old hostelry at Henry's.

While at dinner, I learned that my friend Mason was to hold the stakes for a most remarkable wager. It had been made between two young men who were staying in the vicinity for the shooting season. They were Ned French and Albert Turner, who belonged to the class known as "rich men's sons," and had come to "the land of the sky" for a shooting trip.

The wager in question was the outcome of a heated discussion on personal courage. French had bet one hundred dollars that Turner would not get into an open grave at midnight and drive a nail into the coffin of the departed saint or sinner; and Turner had unhesitatingly accepted the challenge. Mason, as I said, was to be stakeholder, and I, as his friend, was permitted to be a witness. The time appointed for this weird proceeding was midnight, and the affair was to be kept strictly among ourselves.

For a small amount of money, and a larger amount of whisky and tobacco, four negroes, none of whom could be persuaded to undertake the work until that number had been secured, had agreed to open a grave in the forlorn, neglected little churchyard, about a mile from the station.

In the evening I was duly introduced to French and Turner, and we passed the time until the appointed hour by alternately playing billiards and cards and telling ghost stories. Throughout our weirdest tales Turner, however, listened unmoved, even adding a few himself. He was a big, handsome fellow of about five and twenty, and had before the end of his first year at college, where he had been center rush of the football eleven, gained the reputation of being a fearless daredevil, and a total stranger, under any and all circumstances, to that sensation known as fear.

The night was beautifully clear and calm, and the whole village was wrapped in solemn silence when we noiselessly crept out of the hotel on our strange errand. The negroes had gone ahead to do their share of the work. Turner, as he received from the stakeholder the nails and hammer, remarked: "It seems a shame to be forced to disturb the spirit of the departed; but a challenge is a challenge, and I shan't weaken."

Influenced by his light-heartedness, we started off in high spirits. But after the first half mile of our walk we all grew strangely depressed and silent.

With every step the scene became more solemnly impressive and calculated to work on the imagination. The brilliancy of the moonlight on the tall pines made the scattering gravestones on the hillside on our left stand out like miniature ghosts, and the rugged old Blue Ridge peaks in the distance looked hideously grim and threatening. Once the stillness was broken by a frightened rabbit that darted into the road and ran in front of us for several hundred feet, then suddenly turned and, sitting upright, gazed at us curiously for several moments. As we turned off the main road and entered a narrow lane, we were startled by an owl that fluttered from among the pines, hooting ominously as it circled slowly above us. A moment later sounds of weird music floated through the night. By a common impulse we all halted in breathless expectancy. Gazing up the slope at the end

of the lane, we beheld in the crystal moonlight the four darkies sitting about the newly opened grave, chanting with weird solemnity but true jubilee rhythm: —

"Massa's in de col', col' ground."

We stood entranced until the last wailing cadence had died away; then, shaking off the spell produced by the impressive scene and melody, proceeded to the grave. It was that of a man who had been dead about two years; but the coffin, so the negroes said, was in a good state of preservation. The dark pit yawned cold and dismal as, one by one, we gathered around it.

Turner, wearing his shooting-cap and a long, loose ulster reaching to his feet, stood for a moment on the brink, his eyes measuring the depth with daredevil carelessness. Then, quickly stooping, he lowered himself and called for the hammer and nail. As his head disappeared, every eye followed him with tense excitement. Even the darkies, who, at our approach, had withdrawn to the background, could not restrain themselves, and now rushed forward with glistening eyes and eagerly peered down into the grave. A moment later we heard one, two, three dull, muffled sounds as the nail made its way into the coffin.

"He's won the bet," exclaimed half a dozen voices in excited chorus. And the loosening of the intense strain of the last half hour found expression in a tumult of cheers and laughter. The loser of the bet was the first to stoop and reach for Turner's hand. As the man in the grave, however, remained silent, making no attempt to rise, Dr. Mason, suspecting an attempted joke, laughingly exclaimed that, as no one appeared to claim the stakes, he would donate them to the church whose grounds they had desecrated.

Still the man in the grave neither moved nor spoke.

Then French, with one hand on the brink of the grave, lowered himself, and had no sooner seized Turner's arm than he shouted: "He's fainted! Quick, help me pull him out!"

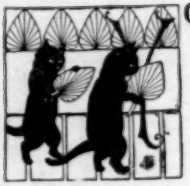
He had hardly spoken when Mason reached down from the opposite side of the grave, and as the two raised the man in their arms we distinctly heard a sharp sound like that of tearing cloth.

They placed the limp figure on the grass, and some one struck a match. The instant that its flickering blaze lit up the rigid, white face we all shrank back in horror, as Mason exclaimed: "He's dead!"

In driving the nail into the coffin, Turner had sent it through the skirt of his long ulster, and on attempting to rise had felt himself held down by an unseen power. The sudden horror of the situation had paralyzed him with a fear that even he could not master. And before thought and reason could come to his assistance his heart had ceased to beat.

In Miss Polly's Pew.

BY ELLEN FRIZZELL WYCOFF.



"YOU are an early riser, sir," said the hotel clerk, glancing up from his books as he spoke. The stranger smiled. He was a tall, well-built man of some forty years, but his blue eyes gleamed boyishly.

"It is a bit early," he replied, "seeing that I turned in rather late last night, but this town is my old home, and I'm going out to see what changes you have been making. Twenty years give time for a good many."

"Twenty years," the clerk said slowly. "Why, that was before I was out of dresses."

"It's a good while," the older man admitted thoughtfully.

"What is your name?" he added, with that doubtful, searching look so common to the eyes of those who are looking backward into the years that are gone.

At the reply he thought a moment, then shook his head.

"One of the changes," he said musingly; "I never knew any one by that name."

"I'm luckier, then; we have a John Harrold here now. So your name is familar to me. We call our John 'Jack,' however."

"They used to call me Jack when I was younger. Yes, that must be one of my Cousin Andy's sons. A likely fellow, if he takes after Andy. Named for me, I bet a sixpence. I'll be glad to see the youngster. I came here partly to look Andy up."

The man's face softened as he spoke, and a tender light shone in his eyes. After all, it was very pleasant, this belated home-coming.

"Where does Andy live now?" he asked after a moment's pause.

"He's dead, sir; died when I was a little boy."

The elder man cleared his throat, coughing a little.

"One should be prepared for a good many changes, as I remarked. Twenty years is a long time. I'll go out before breakfast and have a look at the old town."

With head erect and shoulders well thrown back, he strode out into the echoing street. The town was still silent, for the sun was not yet up. Somewhere, far off, he heard a clock striking five. The sound seemed to drop from the purple sky.

"A good many changes along here," he soliloquized presently, stopping to look about him. "Let's see, this used to be the Mims property,— no, it was near the creek. Let's see, what part of town is this, anyhow?"

A strained, puzzled look came into the man's eyes. His broad shoulders relaxed, and as he continued on his way along the unfamiliar street, his face settled into wistful lines. Whichever way he looked he could see nothing — absolutely nothing — that belonged to his past.

In the place of the homely, low-setting cottages that had once lined the village street were the plate glass and pressed brick of ambitious business blocks, or many gabled, varicolored houses, of a pretentious elegance undreamed of in his boyhood. Even the old oaks and elms were not the same, but had been replaced here and there by closely clipped shrubbery, and trees of foreign origin that had grown tall and stately in his absence.

As the converging lines of the long street opened out into parallels, the man's pace quickened, and presently a glimpse of open space and the soft ripple of water set his heart beating with suffocating force. Just what it was that he expected he had not clearly defined; but when, a moment later, his feet halted on the borders of a smug little park, all gravel walks and flower beds, that sloped to a tiny stream, his eyes darkened.

"Why, this used to be out in the country," he said softly, "and now, even the creek is not the same; everything is changed —"

Suddenly, with a boyish laugh, he sprang forward. Ahead loomed the familiar outlines of a low stone bridge, under whose gray arch the stream gushed from the smug park into what was still the old woods. There were the same old oaks and maples, and — was it possible? Yes, there was the giant beech tree around which centered a thousand happy memories.

Still laughing boyishly, the stranger scrambled down the bank and flung himself at the roots of the old tree, his eyes fixed on the amber bubbling waters of the tiny creek. With the familiar sights and sounds, it seemed as though the flood-gates of his memory were suddenly forced wide open. All in a moment it flashed upon him that it was on the banks of this very stream he had builded the toy mill that first bent his thoughts in the direction of his present prosperous interests. He remembered, too, the fountain successfully constructed by him under the old beech tree by means of a tin pail and a lead pipe that conducted the water from the creek, but wiped out of existence by the owner of the woods after having spouted for only one glorious half hour.

Then there were other associations, memories of fishing excursions or nutting parties that somehow always ended under the old beech; of picnics that were never complete until the picnickers had carved their initals in its smooth bark. With a half-smothered ejaculation the man started up, exclaiming, "I wonder if mine are still there?" As he stood, his hands pressed almost affectionately against the old tree trunk, and began to read the initials and names carved upon it, he saw that some were quite fresh and new, evidently the work of the month or year at the farthest. But further up he spied certain familiar letters, linked often in pairs, and carved within clumsy, lop-sided hearts. He even fancied,— yes, there was surely a blackened "J. H.," his own initials, cut beneath "M. R.," — the whole surrounded by a very wide and generous heart. For a moment he studied wonderingly over these irregular, blackened lines. Then, by degrees, he recalled cutting the heart there one day when resting with a party of schoolfellows under the trees. But whose were the other initials? Of course, they belonged to some girl. He wouldn't have cut a boy's name in a heart, of course, — not when he was nineteen. But who was the girl? Now that he thought of it, he had known a great many nice, sweet girls in those days. What had become of all the womanly women, anyhow? He wondered that he never met that style of woman now. To be sure, his acquaintance with women was limited, but that did not prevent his passing judgment on the sex!

There was an actress or two, several professional women, and

the wives of some of his friends — women who lived in hotels and shuddered at the mere mention of housekeeping. What had become of all the gentle, home-loving women? It did not occur to him that possibly he had drifted away from the life in which such women are found.

His thoughts were away back in the old days. It was like groping in the darkness. Whom had he known in any special way? "M. R." Whose name was that? As he looked at the rude letters a face floated out of the shadows. A sweet face it was, with serene brown eyes, and red curving lips, and a broad, white forehead with soft, wavy brown hair parted daintily above it.

He pressed his hand over his eyes. The face grew more and more distinct. The lips seemed to be smiling, and there was a half fond, half timid look in the gentle eyes.

"Where — where did I get that face photographed on the thing they call my brain? It's there; I see it plainer every moment. Blessed if there isn't a little white, crimped ruffle beginning to show around the neck. Yes, and there's a blue bow under the pretty chin. It's all plain as day, but 'M. R.' — that somehow doesn't seem to go with the face. I should have thought the name was Polly. Why, yes," — with a sudden flash of recollection, — "so it was Polly, dear little Mary Rose!" For a moment the man stood tracing absently with his fingertip the initials in the smooth bark, while a red flush spread over his face.

Behind him the town was awakening with the rising sun. Its steady roar mingled with the twittering of the birds that trilled and fluttered about him; but the man heard nothing. His mind had leaped back twenty years to the time when, as a lad not yet out of his teens, he had sat and fished by this creek with Polly. She had been his first sweetheart, he thought tenderly. His first — why, yes, his first, last, and only sweetheart, the only girl he had ever loved! In a moment it was borne in upon him with a thrill of long dormant feeling, that through all these twenty years of material success his life had been really incomplete, — that it had always lacked something.

"Polly!" he exclaimed aloud, and then stared blankly around, like one awakened from a dream by the sound of his own voice. At the same moment a ground squirrel, startled by the unwonted

noise, scuttled across the log and up the tree, with a shrill "chip, chip," that at once turned the current of his thoughts. Just so the squirrels had run and chattered around him on that evening in early spring, the evening when he sat beneath this old beech for the last time for twenty years. Then, too, as now, he was thinking of Polly, thinking with all the reverence and tenderness of a boy's first love. Even now he could remember the letter that he wrote there, telling his love to the girl whom he worshiped,— the letter that never reached her. It all came back to him now,— the oozing away of his courage, the making and unmaking of his mind, the slow fading of the day as he sat listening to the squirrels and fingering the little sheet of paper. He could remember quite clearly how, overcome by a sense of his own unworthiness, he had wavered between fearing to send the boyish epistle and hesitating to destroy it, and how finally he had compromised by closing it up in a length of lead pipe, left by chance from his earlier abortive attempt at a fountain. He recalled, too, the reverence with which he laid the little sheet in its strange casket, the care with which he sealed it by hammering one end flat with a big rock and closing the other with a rough peg, whittled from the branch of a sapling; even the curious ache in his throat as he cut the initials "M. R." laboriously on the pipe's surface, preparatory to hiding it. Last of all, he recalled how then and there, in his youthful melancholy, he made up his mind to go out into the world that very day, never to return until he had made his fortune.

Moved by a sudden impulse, he hurried down the sloping bank towards the stone bridge — the new bridge it had been in that bygone evening of early springtime, with the mortar still fresh between the rough stones of its foundation. Why he had chosen a niche between those stones as a sort of dead letter office he could not imagine, but that he had, with his pocket-knife, dug out some of the soft mortar and filling, and, carefully depositing the lead pipe in a snug crevice, had walled it up again beyond the possibility of discovery, was as clear to his mind as if it had been a matter of days rather than years ago. Just why, now, he stooped and with his pocket-knife eagerly picked at that well-remembered joint in the foundation that entombed the old letter he under-

stood no better; but the thought that, after all, it might in some mysterious way have disappeared sent an actual chill to his heart. But no — it was there — he seized it — he had it in hands,— that little length of pipe, now black and discolored, with the peg rotting in the end, but still the same!

Still hardly knowing what he did, or why, he thrust the strange relic in his coat pocket, and, climbing the bank, crossed the bridge and turned to a road that cut the main street at right angles. The next moment he stopped short. This side street was unchanged except by a few touches of the paint brush! Yonder stood the old ivy-covered church; there was the tumble-down blacksmith shop; just beyond was the Ives place, and — yes, there before him was Polly's home! He had been in it twice. Once at a little evening party, when Polly gave him a rose, and once after school with his brother Tom, when Polly was making crullers and gave them some. He had always loved roses and crullers! His private greenhouses were noted for their roses, and he kept a cross cook because she made excellent crullers.

But why was he here, and what was it that he wished to do? Ask for Polly? Again that chill clutched his heart at the thought of what might have happened in twenty years. She had been such a sweet girl, it was not among the probabilities that some other man had not long since won her. Or, it might be that —

Something, he hardly knew what, turned his steps back again in the direction of the little blacksmith shop. But even after chatting several minutes with the young man who had just opened his shop and stood working the big bellows, he stammered absurdly over Polly's name.

"Know Miss Mary Rose?" said the blacksmith smilingly; "oh, yes, every one knows her. She's like an aunt to every child in town. Yes, sir, she lives along with her brother right in the same old place, over there —"

But the stranger had gone, with hasty thanks, and was walking swiftly up the shaded walk toward the well-remembered white-pillared house. Everything about the place was very quiet. The old knocker looked as if he had seen it but yesterday. How things were coming back to him! At the sight of all these familiar objects an inspiration flashed through his mind.

The old letter! He would deliver it now! Just what it contained he could not clearly remember; but, whatever its contents, this time he would deliver his letter to Polly.

A moment later he was asking the trim negro maid who opened the door if Miss Rose was at home.

"Miss Mary Rose? Yes, sir; walk right in, sir," said the maid, hospitably throwing open the door.

But the stranger hesitated; then shook his head. "No, I can't stay," he said hurriedly. "I just want to leave her a message," as he spoke, transferring the length of lead pipe from his pocket to the hand of the bewildered housemaid.

"A message for Miss Mary?" she said blankly.

"Yes, that is —" He hesitated again; then, hastily producing his card, he scribbled on it his hotel address, and across one end the words, "After twenty years."

"Give her that," he murmured. "She will understand." And thrusting the pasteboard into the maid's half reluctant fingers, he turned and strode off down the path.

"A message for me, Peggy?" said Miss Polly a moment later, as she set down the gem pans and looked dubiously at the curious object that Peggy laid before her on the kitchen table.

"Yessem. Er gemmen fotch hit himse'f, jes' now. Yere's his card. I'se goin' to see whut Miss Bessie want."

When Peggy returned she found the pans still unfilled and Miss Polly sitting gazing incredulously at a piece of paper on her lap.

"Look after the gems, Peggy," she said softly, "and, O Peggy, what did the gentleman look like?"

"He's tallish an' middlin' heavy built, Miss Ma'y, but ef de Lawd doe know him no bettern I does, der mane's los'. He's likely in de face, an' his hair's er dock pepper an' salt. I never have saw him befo', an' I'se seen mighty nigh — "

"Look after the gems and settle the coffee. Had he blue eyes, Peggy? Bright, deep blue, with a merry look like little Sol's, and black lashes that curl up like Kitty's, and — "

"Lor, Miss Ma'y, I didden tuck de mane down an' 'zamin him wive er microbe. Who's you 'spectin'? I recken hit's him."

She stopped and looked at the woman whose flushed face was bent over the open letter. And then, somehow, she moved about

softly, closing the oven door without a sound, and handling dishes without the usual clatter. For the place seemed changed now, Miss Mary's face was shining so. And after awhile, when Miss Mary looked up, she seemed not to see Peggy.

"I didn't even know that he was here; but I always knew that, if it was best for him, God would send him back to me." And then she got up and went up to her room where she read the letter again, stopping to comb Flossie's hair, and again to button Tommie's shoes. For her room was only the nursery in her brother's house, and the children were her special charges.

Last night she had dreamed that she was a girl again. She, a middle-aged woman! And she had been very foolish and cried herself to sleep because Flossie told her that Mrs. Perkins had called her an old maid. But the sweet dream had come to her when the one lover of her girlhood, the handsome, bashful boy-lover had said nice things to her — the things he had left unsaid in the years gone by — and had looked tenderly into her eyes. She had not been able, all at once, to descend to practical every-day life, when she awoke from her dream.

Such a long time she had loved him, and dreamed about him, and thought of him, going over a thousand times every little word he had said to her, and seeing again every smile. And now he was at home again, and had asked her to marry him.

It was a somewhat flowery and impassioned epistle, that yellow old sheet, and curiously incongruous coming from a middle-aged man of business, but it was a very precious letter to the woman who read it, and kissed it, and bathed it with thankful tears. Before she left the room she knelt for a moment in thankfulness, and then she wrote her answer: —

"*Dear Jack:* — If you feel now as you did twenty years ago, come to see me to-morrow.

"I have been waiting for you.

"POLLY."

It was this letter, brought by the faithful Peggy to the hotel address written on his card, that John Harrold found on his table that evening, after a day spent in driving about town with Andy's son, the second Jack Harrold.

From his young namesake, who was secretly much astonished at his cousin's youthful buoyancy and intense interest in the affairs of his boyhood's home, he had learned that of Miss Polly's goodness and sweetness that set vibrating still more strongly those feelings of twenty years ago; and as he broke the seal of the little envelope, addressed in the well-known writing, his heart throbbed like that of a lad hardly out of his teens.

When he grasped the meaning of the womanly message his eyes dimmed.

"She cares for me still," he murmured. "She has been waiting for me. Even when I thought no one cared for me, when I felt friendless and all alone, she loved me. When I forgot her, she loved me, prayed for me. I always felt something tugging at my heart when I began anything extra bad, and I venture it was Polly's prayers. I wonder," with a sudden thought, "if she'll be at the old church to-morrow morning. Why, of course she will, and I will go and sit behind her, as I used to do, and — " The rest of his thoughts became inarticulate.

Dr. Rose and his wife attended a church farther up town; but Miss Mary was usually tired, and always easily pleased, and the old church suited her. And so when, upon his entrance into the old meeting-house the next morning, John Harrold glanced toward the Rose pew, he saw her sitting there all alone. She wore a little black bonnet, with a soft black plume against her brown, parted hair, and a black dress with a white, crimped ruffle at the neck. As, still watching her, he mechanically seated himself in what had once been his father's pew, some one touched his shoulder. He looked up, to find a very terrible old lady with an intensely black false front and intensely white false teeth glaring down at him.

"My pew, if you please," she said in a shrill whisper, and John Harrold stumbled out, wishing himself safely out of it all. And as his last calm moments had been spent in contemplating the lonely occupant of the Rose pew, he mechanically made his way to it and sat down. Polly looked up with a sweet smile and the tiniest of welcoming nods.

The music began just here, soft and low, and some one began to sing in a low, plaintive voice. John had not been inside of a

church for years, but now a heavy wave of feeling shook his strong frame, and there were tears on the black lashes that curled up like Kitty Harrold's. After all, he thought, what was he that he should hope to join his life to that of this sweet, unworldly woman?

There was a sudden sob and quiver in the music. He glanced at Polly. A faint smile was trembling on her lips. He saw the lines that lay about them, and all at once he acquired the skill of an expert deciphering hieroglyphics. He read in these faint lines of patience, sweetness, goodness, tenderness, — all that his life had sorely lacked. The rosy light from a stained-glass window transformed her shining hair into the halo of a saint. The music throbbed and trembled and then died away. He heard not a word of the sermon. A new glory had entered his soul. This woman who had loved him always was his own. He might stretch out his hand and fold her to his lonely heart. She had waited for him — for him.

It was over at last, and she turned to him and held out her hand, as she lifted her timid eyes to his face.

"Polly, darling," he said in his low, deep voice, taking her hand in both his own, and entirely missing the look of amazement on the faces about them.

But Polly was a woman, and not the smallest drop in her overflowing cup of bliss was the knowledge that Mrs. Perkins had heard those tender words!